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ABSTRACT

An alternative to traditional teacher evaluation is offered through the development of an objectives-oriented growth plan for classroom teachers. Responsibility for establishing the growth plan is placed with the individual teacher, who is required to specify personal goals and objectives, and to design, carry out, and evaluate the program annually. This manual provides an outline for the use of the teacher in the implementation of this type of improvement program. Sample goals and objectives are proposed for consideration and a format is provided for developing realistic sets of objectives and for evaluating personal and professional progress. (JD)

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PLANNING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH TOGETHER

Manual for Writing Professional Objectives

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Administrators and teachers* have long expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional approach to teacher evaluation. Much of this dissatisfaction centers around the fact that, for the most part, little is improved as a result of evaluation. That is, teachers do not teach any better and students do not learn any more as a consequence. Other criticisms include the passive role assigned to teachers, infrequency of evaluations, forced comparisons and labeling, and the highly subjective nature of the process. The process is frequently viewed as a waste of time, except in those rare cases where contract renewal is actually in question.

A possible alternative to the traditional teacher evaluation process is that of professional objectives. This approach places the responsibility for professional growth where it belongs, with the teacher. It requires each teacher to design, carry out and evaluate his/her own professional improvement plan annually. When properly implemented, this approach puts the teacher in competition only with himself or herself, not with others. The emphasis is on achievement rather than on the person; thus the process is far more productive and objective. In addition, the process of sharing objectives with one's administrator tends to substantially increase the frequency as well as improve the quality of communication within those relationships.

In 1969, the Fort Wayne Teachers Association and the Fort Wayne Community School Corporation mutually agreed to use professional objectives rather than the traditional approach in the evaluation of tenured teachers. This decision was made after three years of experimentation with professional objectives. More than two hundred teachers in twelve schools were involved in these pilot programs.

Because this approach to evaluation requires active participation and responsibility on the teacher's part, it is essential that each teacher thoroughly understand the entire process. Let us begin with some basic terms used.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Participation in this process requires understanding of two basic terms: goal and objective. The following are goals:

To use a variety of instructional techniques
To be an enthusiastic teacher
To be a fair teacher

* The term "teacher" will be used throughout this paper to mean all the professional persons employed in an educational setting except the administrator.

What characteristics do these examples share? Write your responses in the space below.

Goals are:

Your responses should include some of the following characteristics: vague, broad, difficult to measure, and something one strives for but seldom, if ever, completely achieves.
A GOAL IS A BROAD STATEMENT OF GENERAL INTENT OVER A LONG TIME PERIOD.

Now let us look at some examples of objectives.

To develop and try out at least five new learning centers for science before the end of the year.
To contact (call or write a note) the parents of every student in my 5th hour at least once this year to report on at least one thing their son/daughter does well.
To make up a test parallel to the final chapter test for each chapter in the algebra book by the end of May.

Write the characteristics shared by objectives in the space below.

Objectives are:

In contrast to goals, you no doubt observed that objectives are specific, narrow, measurable, and attainable over a relatively short time period. AN OBJECTIVE IS A SPECIFIC STATEMENT OF INTENDED MEASURABLE ACHIEVEMENT OVER A SHORT TIME.

We will now turn our attention to two ways in which these terms have been used in education. These are: instructional goals and objectives and professional goals and objectives.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

You are probably already familiar with instructional goals and objectives. Instructional goals and objectives refer to student outcomes or behaviors. That is, they tell what a student should be able to do at the end of a period of instruction that he or she could not do before it. The following is am example of an instructional goal:

Student will have basic writing skills

An instructional objective related to this goal is:

Given five unpunctuated sentences, each containing conversation, the student should be able to punctuate at least four without an error.

Thus, an INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL IS A STATEMENT OF THE GENERAL OR BROAD BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES OF INSTRUCTION OVER A LONG TIME. Whereas an INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVE IS A STATEMENT OF SPECIFIC STUDENT BEHAVIOR CHANGE RESULTING FROM A SHORT PERIOD OF INSTRUCTION.

PROFESSIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Whereas instructional goals and objectives deal with student behavior change, professional goals and objectives are concerned with teacher behaviors, responsibilities, growth, etc.. The following are examples of professional goals:

To help students develop healthy self concepts

I want my students to see that I am really interested in them

To have interesting classes

It is apparent that a PROFESSIONAL GOAL IS A BROAD STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTION OF ONE'S INTENDED GROWTH OVER A LONG TIME.

If one is serious about professional goals, then one will devise more specific methods of working toward these goals. These specific plans of action are called professional objectives. A PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE IS A SPECIFIC STATEMENT OF ONE'S INTENDED ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN A DEFINITE AREA OVER A SPECIFIED TIME.

Some examples are:

To write at least one positive comment to each student during each grading period.

I will attend at least 5 non-required extracurricular activities during each semester.

I will design and implement at least 3 new games to be used in drilling multiplication tables.

Since you now have the basic idea of professional objectives, let us expand upon this idea.

HOW TO WRITE PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES

A "full blown" professional objective contains at least the following elements:

1. Objective-A brief statement of what is to be done
2. Procedures-An outline of steps to be followed in in getting it done; often includes completion target dates.
3. Evaluation-A description of the evidence of achievement.

While the actual terms used for each of these three parts of a professional objective may vary from school to school or corporation to corporation, the function of each remains the same.

The following is a sample professional objective.

Objective: To develop definite sets of criteria to be used in the grading of at least 8 of the 12 essay tests I use each year in my American History course.

Procedures:

1. Unit I test - Completed by Sept 20
   Unit II test - Completed by Oct. 15
   Unit III test - Completed by Nov. 15
   Unit IV test - Completed by Dec. 20
   Unit V test - Completed by Jan. 30
   Unit VI test - Completed by March 1
   Unit VII test - Completed by April 5
   Unit VIII test - Completed by May 15
   (I'm only attempting to complete unit tests this year; hope to do quarterly tests next year)

2. Each set of criteria will be developed using the 6th hour students' papers as a guide.

3. Each set of criteria will be critiqued and revised by Social Studies Department Chairperson.

4. Each set will be used to evaluate the 2nd hour students' tests and revised where necessary.

5. Criteria will be typed and made available to subsequent American History teachers and students.

Evaluation: A completed set of criteria corresponding to each unit will be available.

Some teachers have found it helpful to go beyond the bare essentials in writing their professional objectives. Accordingly, a professional objective could take the following form.

Goal: I want to be able to lead students in thinking futuristically.

Rationale: I chose this goal because I feel that the elementary curriculum is overly oriented to the present and the past. Since my students will be the adults of the 21st century, I feel a need to lead them in planning their personal futures as well as world futures.

Objective: I will design and conduct at least ten futuristic learning activities during this year.

Rationale: Since the adopted texts do not include such activities, I will have to design them myself. I believe that developing ten such activities will challenge my creativity and will be adequate for my students.

Procedures:

1. Administer pretest to students: "What is Your Future Quotient?" - Sept. 6
2. Send memo to other teachers asking if they have ideas for futuristic learning activities - Sept. 15
3. Check various professional magazines; e.g., Instructor, Teacher, Learning, etc. for ideas
4. Attend workshop offered at university "The Future in Your Classroom", Oct. 17
5. Try to develop and use one learning activity each month.
6. Retain materials, notes, etc. for each activity in a separate folder.
7. Administer post test by June 6

Evaluation:
(1) The ten folders containing the learning activities will be available.
(2) Compare results of pre and post tests.

Some schools have decided to use a standard format while others have decided to allow teachers to use whatever format seems best for them.

CONFERENCES

Sharing objectives with one's administrator is an essential part of this process. Usually, three conferences are involved.
(Insert diagram here)

Preliminary Conferences

This conference is usually held very early in the fall. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for the teacher to talk over potential objectives for that year with his or her administrator. This oral thinking and planning together usually results in clarification and strengthening of the original objectives. Two heads can be better than one!

The role of the administrator is that of a facilitator during the conference and throughout the year. That is, once an administrator is aware of what it is that each teacher wants to accomplish for that year, (s)he is in a much better position to assist them

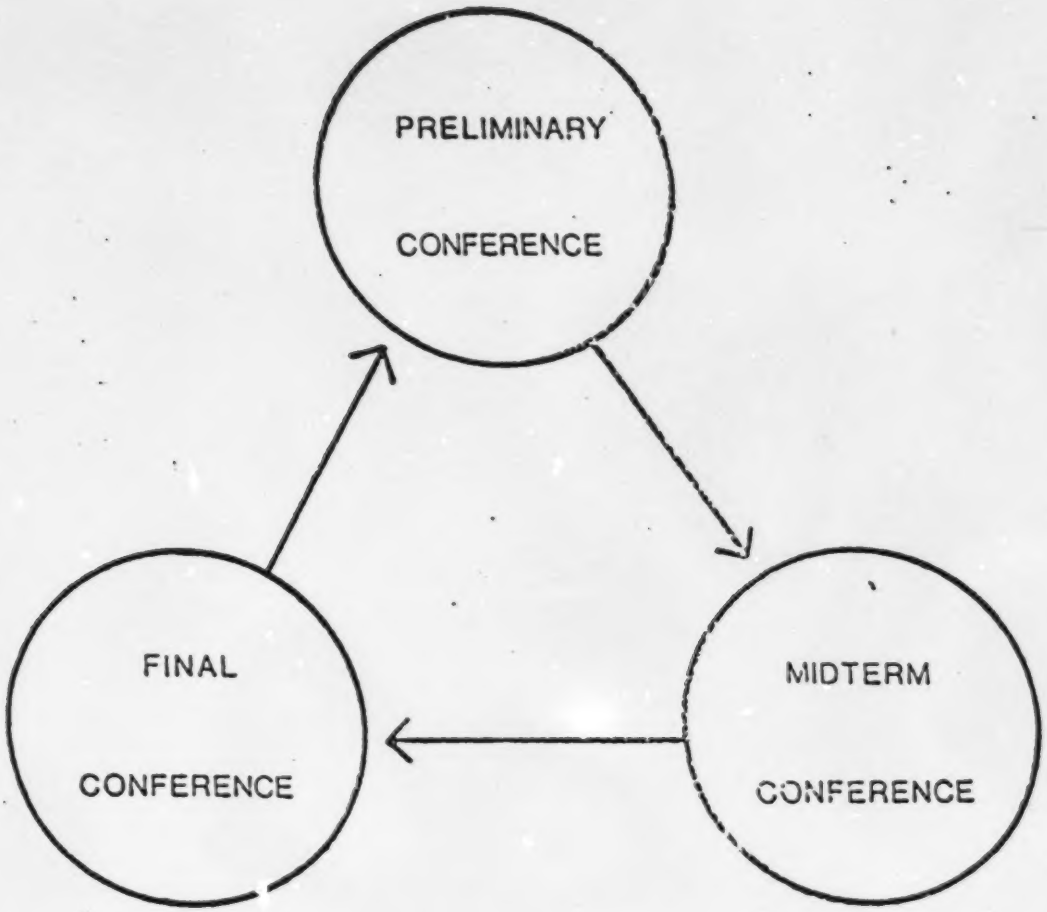
After this conference during which the objectives have been mutually agreed upon, the teacher completes the writing up of the objectives and sends a copy to the administrator.

Midterm Conference

As the term indicates, this conference is held midway through the school year. The purpose of it is to provide a halfway checkpoint. If the teacher is having problems meeting his or her objective, these are discussed, and hopefully, resolved in this conference. If unexpected events have forced a change in objectives, a new agreement can be made at this time.

Final Conference

This meeting between the teacher and the administrator takes place during the final weeks of the school year. It is at this time that the teacher shares with the administrator the evidence of the completed objectives. This is usually a very satisfying experience for both parties. Frequently, the discussion turns to plans for the next year's objectives toward the end of this conference. Thus the final conference prepares the way for the preliminary conference.



PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES

CYCLE

VARIATIONS

School Goals and Objectives: The entire team of professionals within a particular school could decide to pursue some goal; e.g. improving home-school relations, developing responsible students, etc. Each individual then designs one or more objective related to that goal area. This kind of total school effort can make a great impact on a target area.

Department/Team Goals and Objectives: Members of a teaching team or department might decide to attack a particular problem area together; e.g. improving students' writing skills. Using this as a common goal, individual members of the department then proceed to design one or more objectives related to that goal.

Cooperative Goals and Objectives: Occasionally two or more teachers might mutually design an objective. E.g. Teachers from different subject areas might select as an objective the design and teaching of an interdisciplinary unit.

Student Goals and Objectives: Some teachers, coaches and counselors have found this process so helpful that they have involved students in a similar process. E.g. A basketball player might select as his or her objective to make 25 free throws every day, regardless of the number of attempts involved. An overly shy counselee might decide to initiate a conversation with another student at least once during every school day. In these situations the professional holds conferences with the students involved just as described for the administrator. It should be noted that implementing this process with a group of students could be considered a professional objective for the teacher, counselor, or coach involved.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS

What happens if I don't meet my objectives?

Normally objectives are met without great difficulty. Remember that you and your administrator mutually agreed that the objectives were appropriate and realistic at the outset. It is unlikely that both parties would make a serious error in judgment. In addition, objectives can and should be adjusted at the midterm conference to allow for the unexpected. Always keep in mind that objectives are merely a means to professional growth and are not an end in themselves. If completing an objective no longer makes good sense, then it should be changed. Finally, even the best professional fails to complete every objective set throughout a career. When this occurs, usually the most serious consequence is a sense of having let oneself down.

What if my administrator doesn't like my objectives?

Your objectives are your plan for professional growth. Therefore, an administrator will not be judging them on a personal preference basis. In the event that a professional outlines a plan for growth that is inadequate, however, the administrator would assist in revising the plan. As the designated representative of the corporation, s(he) has a responsibility to see that employees' performance is satisfactory.

Will my objectives ever be used as evidence of unsatisfactory performance?

Recall that the primary purpose of this process is to encourage and facilitate professional growth. Clearly, this is quite different from the purpose you cite. Note also that one selects one's own professional objectives thereby placing quality control and responsibility in the hands of the person writing and owning the objectives. Professional objectives represent a person as do the other actions, behaviors, etc. of that person. As such, one's objectives are part of one's overall performance. It is logical to expect that a sincere, competent professional will have objectives which reflect this sincerity and competence. Therefore, the fear that one would be dismissed solely on the basis of his/her professional objectives is groundless.

Writing these is going to take alot of extra time...time that would be better spent in doing something. Why do we have to write them?

People who have participated in this process agree that the thinking through of an objective, planning the steps for its accomplishment and determining the evaluation, which are all involved in writing an objective, are extremely valuable. If it is not written, but merely kept in one's head, there is a much greater possibility that it will not get done. One's commitment is increased through writing as well as sharing with another person.

Will my professional objectives be kept in my personnel file?

Since your objectives serve as your professional growth plan for a year, there is no need to keep these from year to year. Consequently, they can be returned to you at the end of the year for they have served their purpose. Many professionals choose to attach the evidence of their accomplishments to their objectives and request to have this retained in their files. These persons are justifiably proud of their achievements and want these to become a part of their permanent record.

What is to prevent a professional from padding, falsifying, etc. just to make himself or herself look good to the administrator?

Very little. It is entirely possible that one could "make up" objectives and produce fake evidence of achievement. This process is based on the assumption that professionals are willing and able to assume responsibility for their own improvement. If we cannot make this assumption then we've got serious problems.

Remember, too, that any teacher evaluation process can be outsmarted to some extent. Perhaps the issue you're really raising is whether this process will protect the incompetent professional. The truly incompetent professional identifies himself/herself by an overall pattern of inadequacies in one or more essential area. It is doubtful that even the flashiest set of phony objectives would conceal these inadequate behaviors.

Some professionals have tried the approach you suggest, that is, they have written what they think administrators want to read rather than identifying what is honest and practical for their own professional growth. Ultimately they have come to realize that they are only hurting themselves; they have nothing to gain by misusing the trust that has been placed in them.

I am not afraid of this process with my present administrator but what about the administrator who's out to get people?

If such an administrator exists, then the only protection you have, regardless of the evaluation system used, is your right to due process. The process of writing professional objectives does not alter your vulnerability. It does, however, provide you with the opportunity to identify and document your achievements over the years. This increases objectivity and fairness.

Is this just another fad that will pass quickly?

Possibly. However, if we allow it to be merely a passing fad we will have missed a golden opportunity to radically improve the teacher evaluation process. On a more philosophical level, wherever and whenever people really believe that the strength of an organization is the potential of the people within that organization, some form of this process will continue. Keep in mind, too, that this process of setting objectives has been in use for years in other settings. Hopefully, once you have experienced the process, you will see that it not only makes good sense but is a fair and positive approach to evaluation.

Reminders

- Your objectives should deal only with what you can control; i.e., you cannot directly control students' test scores but you can control the teaching/learning conditions prior to testing.

- Say what you mean and mean what you say when writing objectives. This will save embarrassment when you come to evaluate yourself.

- Remember to consult those who need to be consulted when planning your objectives.

- When writing cooperative objectives, be very sure that each person involved knows exactly what his or her responsibilities are with respect to completing the objectives.

- Your objectives represent you and what you value in regard to your own professional growth. Therefore, the serious professional will deal with substantive issues in selecting objectives thereby avoiding trivia.

- This process is only as good as the people involved make it. In this sense, it is much like a computer; if garbage is put in, garbage will come out!